



**2012 RECOMMENDATIONS  
CIVIL SOCIETY AND PRIVATE SECTOR PREPARATORY FORUM  
DECEMBER 11-12, 2012  
TUNIS, TUNISIA**

Civil society representatives from the G8 and Broader Middle East and North Africa (“BMENA”) countries met in Tunis, Tunisia (December 2012) for the Civil Society Preparatory Forum of the 9<sup>th</sup> Forum for the Future. Delegates reviewed the results of two preparatory workshops in El Jadida, Morocco (September 2012) and Amman, Jordan (October 2012); and a Sub-Ministerial Meeting in Washington, DC (November 2012). Delegates reviewed all summary documents and agreed on the following recommendations.

These recommendations are framed within the three overarching themes of the 2012 G8-BMENA Initiative: Women’s Empowerment; Economic Governance and Entrepreneurship; and Freedom of Expression and Association.

**WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT**

**1. FOLLOW-UP MECHANISMS**

- A. Civil society stressed the need to follow up on recommendations from the Forum for the Future process (2004-2012). There is also a need for a body, made up of activists from across the region, to monitor, evaluate, and create accountability for the implementation of recommendations. Implementation mechanisms should include building capacity of CSOs so they can play a more effective role.
- B. In each country, NGOs should cooperate to form a national movement to assess the implementation of Forum for the Future recommendations and follow up with their own governments.
- C. In countries where it is very difficult to separate government and civil society, a follow-up mechanism from outside civil society is needed to oversee and monitor the implementation of Forum for the Future recommendations.

**2. EDUCATION**

- A. The role of rural women is critical to the success of women's empowerment in a given country. Women must be better educated generally, and specifically must be made aware of their rights.
- B. Civil society stressed the need to educate both women and men about women's rights. Men must be recruited to work with and support women's empowerment issues.
- C. The media must do its part to educate women about their rights, and to portray women positively, limiting stereotyping.



### **3. NGO CAPACITY**

- A. Civil society suffers from lack of resources and, sometimes, government harassment. It needs more support to do its work on behalf of women.
- B. Women's associations must be trained using specific criteria on human and political rights in order to keep up with democratic transitions in the region and maintain the gains of the Arab Spring.
- C. Civil society expresses the need to form more associations to defend and advocate on behalf of women.

### **4. PARTICIPATION**

- A. In addition to increasing the representation of women in government and the private sector, we must also focus on increasing representation in religious institutions.
- B. There is need to recruit religious scholars to support women's empowerment in Islamic societies to ensure its success. There is also a need for religious leaders to interpret the Quran with an enlightened understanding of women's role in Islam.
- C. Quotas are critical to political participation and must be more widely implemented. Quotas should be expanded beyond legislatures and should include the executive branch, foreign ambassadors, and provincial-level positions.
- D. Civil society stresses the importance of women's inclusion in constitution-drafting.
- E. A comprehensive gender mainstreaming strategy should be adopted at all decision-making levels of government.

### **5. INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS**

- A. Civil society emphasizes the need for countries to lift their reservations to CEDAW.
- B. Judges must honor the pre-eminence of international law over domestic law. They also must be trained to fairly implement these applicable laws.

### **6. ECONOMY**

- A. Participants emphasized the importance of creating an enabling environment for women using legislation, such as by creating regulations requiring daycare centers near large workplaces.
- B. Participants want to focus on making maternity leave and family leave mainstream and ratifying applicable international conventions.



- C. There is a need for public-private partnerships that support women. For example, this could include an effort to unify retirement rights among the three sectors (civil society, private sector, public sector) to allow for equal pensions. The three sectors should work hand-in-hand.
- D. The private sector must lead the way, committing to supporting women in its policies, such as in its family leave provisions, even when the law does not require such support.
- E. There is a need to reform inheritance laws to ensure that women are not discriminated against in that context.
- F. Gender budgeting and banking mechanisms, especially at local levels, are important indications of the political will for women's advancement. Civil society must promote these practices.

## **7. SECURITY**

- A. Participants insist on banning representations of violence against women, and better punishing violence against women.
- B. There is a need to ensure the security of women in armed conflicts. Participants emphasized the importance of declaring solidarity with Syrian women.

## **8. MINORITY GROUPS**

- A. Disabled women's rights must be addressed.
- B. There is a need to guarantee the political and economic participation of youth using constitutional and legal frameworks.

# **ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

## **1. PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS**

- A. Civil society called for a charter that defines a development model that would serve as a roadmap to reach consensus between trade unions, civil society, private sector, and the government on short-term strategies as well as long-term sustainable development approaches. This would include a discussion on the:
  - i. role of trade unions, employers, and entrepreneurs and how they can support the economic situation of women and youth during democratic transitional periods, and
  - ii. the need to place more women in leadership positions.



- B. Delegates also recommended the creation of high-level joint public-private and labor union-civil society committees, which would elaborate guidelines for financing and incentivizing the different economic sectors.
- C. There is also a need for the development of public-private partnerships to specifically address poverty.

## **2. ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT**

- A. Associations should be empowered to advocate for better entrepreneurship, transparency, and integrity in the private sector.
- B. Delegates also highlighted the importance of the media and freedom of the press to support freedom of expression and its impact on the private sector and economic development.
- C. Civil society also stressed the need to include civil society in economic decisions in a timely manner.

## **3. LEGISLATIVE REFORMS**

- A. Civil society and the private sector emphasized the need for legislation requiring corporate social responsibility for private companies.
- B. Participants mentioned the need for requirements to update existing legislation on economic development and entrepreneurship.
- C. There is a need for mechanisms for good governance and transparency, especially at the level of procurement and the selling of national wealth.
- D. Participants reiterated the importance of implementation mechanisms.

## **4. ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

- A. Participants highlighted the need to economically empower women and discussed the barriers they face (with an emphasis on violence against women).
- B. Participants urged that human trafficking be reduced.
- C. Participants stressed the need for funding of small and medium sized projects that can build economies in business in remote areas.
- D. Civil society and the private sector brought up the importance of empowering minority groups, especially those that have been displaced.
- E. Participants emphasized their support of human rights (and human rights defenders), as well as the freedom and empowerment of associations.



## **FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION**

### **1. LEGISLATIVE REFORM**

- A. Civil society reiterates the importance of the creation and implementation of clear legislation and human rights frameworks that respect international conventions. They also stressed the need to clarify current laws that are subject to interpretation.
- B. Freedom of expression, association, and access to information should be enshrined in new constitutional laws that respect international covenants and conventions on human rights. In addition, laws that are related to these freedoms should be prioritized in national political discussions and agendas.
- C. All NGO laws should regulate the civil society structure. When there is a law that regulates one sector, there is no way for this sector to advocate for better legislation and conditions. Thus, laws inherited from dictatorships that disrespect international human rights conventions should be banned. This effort should address the amendment of NGO laws that hinder civil society activity.
- D. Civil society advocated for legislation that would hold all corrupt individuals accountable and the implementation of a legal framework for transparency in the media, which would monitor the funding of media organizations.

### **2. FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION**

- A. There is a need to mobilize existing NGOs to challenge threats to freedom of expression and association. These organizations must also include women and youth.
- B. It was noted that legal and financial constraints hamper civil society activity.
- C. Participants emphasized the need to put pressure on governments that abuse human rights by detaining civil society activists for organizing and expressing their opinions.
- D. The main challenge to the right of peaceful association is the absence of conduct codes for these organizations.
- E. It was agreed that the private sector also has a social responsibility to enable freedom of expression.

### **3. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**

- A. Civil society stressed the need to implement ICCPR Article 19.1, which protects an individual's right to hold an opinion. This article protects people against inquisition.



- B. In the absence of an active civil society, academic institutions may serve as an important platform to train people for organizing and to allow freedom of expression in the classroom.
- C. Government censorship of artistic expression should be reduced or eliminated.
- D. Access to information was deemed crucial for the effective participation of civil society.

#### **4. ACCOUNTABILITY**

- A. The issue of accountability, especially in the case of transitioning countries, was identified as crucial. It is important to create a mechanism that punishes governments or organizations that violate human rights. Civil society must take into account those who can impose those sanctions on governments and function as an accountability mechanism.
- B. There is a need to improve media integrity, especially in the case of organizations that incite discrimination or demonstrate an agenda. Thus, participants suggested the creation of an alternative media managed by the civil society that guarantees the right to free expression.